

Hello my name is Colette Staab. I'm speaking as a parent and as a teacher. I have taught for 23 years. I am an elementary art school teacher and a little over 10 years ago my principal put me in the position of the lunch detention monitor. It is ironic that he picked me. I call myself the school hippie, the one all about peace and nature, and now I'm to be the tough guy. I find the good in everybody, for example, all of you may not see eye to eye with me politically but all of you are still on my team to make education great for our students. So since we are on the same team I wanted to share my story with the hope that we could work together and fix the problem I see and I'm hopeful that you will see it too.

I went back to school for my fourth certification in an education field. This time it's for Restorative Practices. So you can imagine the excitement I felt when I read this part of the new recess law, "For denials based on violations of the school district's code of conduct, students may not be denied recess more than twice per week. Further, these students shall be provided restorative justice activities during the recess period. A restorative justice activity is designed to improve the socioemotional and behavioral responses of students through a less punitive intervention." It's a dream to me. Not because I have less detention kids but because I love the fact that I have a new role as the "restorative justice detention facilitator" and in this new role I can work with families and students to restore relationships, teach empathy and problem solving. It's a beautiful thing.

Here is the problem I see. How many teachers or education support professionals have gone to school for restorative practices that are also in charge of students at recess detention time? I am guessing it's rare. I think my school actually really lucky. In the past year I have taught over 100 of my peers about restorative practices. Not one has ever heard of it prior to my training. (Nobody, not one person). Over the past year quite a large number of people asked what I was going to school for and when I responded only about 3 people knew what it was. Do you see my concern? I did get the clarification email from the DOE on Tuesday about it not starting this year so I am glad that districts have a year to plan for this. Honestly, I would have loved for it to have started right away but clearly school staff members are not ready.

My big question is how can you help us get ready for restorative justice implementation? We do not want anyone breaking the new law but if they (Educators/administrators) don't understand what restorative justice is, that could be an easy infraction. I'm wondering if you could encourage schools to get the training they need. In all of my studies the successful schools that use restorative practices have a coordinator role within their districts that facilitates conferences and assists the staff with conflicts. Would you consider explaining and encouraging that staff addition to our districts? We have only one year. Most trainings for staff have been planned and budgeted for in schools. Can you come up with plans to get this organized in the tight time frames that school employees have? Can you supply funds to schools that do not have any training in place for subs or trainers to come in?

I want what is best for our students and I know all of you do too. I firmly believe in the restorative justice process and I am guessing that you and the Department of Education are supportive of it as well. If that is the case, I think we all need to figure out how we can educate more districts about restorative justice before this law is enforced.